

Board of Education of the Blind

H. KENNETH McCOLLAM, *Executive Secretary*

Established—1893. *Statutory authority*—Chapter 174, General Statutes

Central Office—State Office Building, Hartford, Tel. JACKson 7-6341, Ext. 775

Average number of full-time employees—55

Expenditures 1959-1960—Recurring operating expenditures, \$605,890.25;

Capital outlay, \$1,828.77

Organization structure—Three divisions: Business Administration, Children's Services, Adult Services.

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The Board of Education of the Blind consists of Governor Abraham A. Ribicoff, Chief Justice Raymond E. Baldwin and five members appointed by the Governor for four year terms. The members presently serving are Miss Marian Feuchtwanger of New Haven, Mrs. Elizabeth Ewing of West Hartford, Mr. William Luxton of Guilford, Rev. Robert Shea of Rocky Hill, and Mr. Robert Skilton of Morris.

The Board is the oldest governmental agency for the blind in the country. It is an independent state agency which provides multi services to some 3,200 blind residents, including education of blind children, vocational rehabilitation of blind adults, home teaching, home industry and marketing goods made by the blind. The agency also provides social case work service, business opportunities such as vending stands and other small enterprises, vacation and recreational programs, and is the authorized distributor of talking book machines.

During the past year, the agency has made considerable progress in several areas of activity including increased educational services in both public and residential schools; increased opportunities for employment of blind adults; more vacation periods arranged at Harkness Memorial Park; and group recreational activities organized in the Hartford area. Cooperative relationships with state and private agencies have been strengthened and through a newly developed agreement with the Department of Welfare eye medical care for recipients of assistance to the blind has been effected.

Services of a part-time mobility trainer have been made available to those blind persons who desire to learn to travel by use of a cane. White canes have again been provided to blind persons without cost through the generous donation of the Delta Gamma Sorority of Fairfield. Through cooperation with this Board and with the Office of Rehabilitation in Washington, D.C., the John J. McCook Memorial Hospital, Hartford has established a low vision clinic which will serve partially blind persons in the Northern Connecticut area.

Division of Adult Services

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION. The Rehabilitation Division conducts a program of Vocational Rehabilitation through a joint participation of state and federal funds. The staff for this division of the organization consists of a supervisor and four Rehabilitation Counselors with necessary clerical personnel. Through this division blind persons 16 years of age or over who have a vocational handicap and have a reasonable likelihood of productive employment are eligible for counseling and guidance, physical restoration, service of prosthetic appliances, training, tools and equipment, and placement in gainful employment.

For the fiscal year ending June, 1960, each member of the counseling staff carried an active case load of between 35 and 40 clients. Approximately 50% of the rehabilitation supervisor's time was devoted to counseling and guidance. Each counselor has also carried approximately 15 to 20 clients in referred status. For this past fiscal year, 63 clients were rehabilitated and placed in remunerative employment.

During this year 165 new cases were referred. Of these cases, 57 were found to be non-feasible for rehabilitation services, 94 were accepted. The over-all figures for employment of blind workers in Connecticut as of June 30, 1960 showed that 581 blind persons were engaged in some type of gainful employment. Out of the total number, 191 were employed in competitive industry and 390 in non-industrial occupations. The expenditures of the Vocational Rehabilitation program for this year amounted to \$74,900; \$40,600 was the federal share, and the remaining \$34,300 was furnished through state funds.

VENDING STAND PROGRAM. The agency now supervises 25 vending stands or food service enterprises managed by trained blind operators who have collectively earned over \$82,000 for the year. The gross sales of these stands amounted to approximately \$510,000. In addition to the earnings of the stand operators several blind persons derived about \$4,800 from commissions from vending machines installed in public buildings.

During the year a blind manager was installed in the employees snack bar of Sears Roebuck and Co., Hamden. This opened up the possibility of additional opportunities in other Sears Roebuck stores and other private establishments within the state.

HOME TEACHING. The Home Teaching program of the agency is comprised of a supervisor and six professionally trained teachers of the blind who visit the homes of the blind throughout the state to provide instruction in Braille and handicrafts and also to assist newly blinded individuals in adjustment to their handicap. Each blind teacher has the assistance of a guide-driver to facilitate travel to the various parts of the state. During the past year 341 pupils received instruction in Braille, adjustment to blindness, typewriting, use of cane, needlecraft, handcraft, and machine sewing. In addition, 150 persons received further calls for special services. The Supervisor of Home Teachers serves as an intake person in the agency in addition to her supervisory duties over the home teaching program. In carrying out this phase of the agency's work, 452 clients were interviewed and 238 investigations of newly referred clients were made. In addition to these functions, the Supervisor of Home Teachers administered the Harkness State Park vacation program where 40 adults enjoyed one week of camping experience.

Other services rendered by the agency involved participation in public relations activity; organization of community resources for a group recreational program for the blind; and development of volunteer home visiting service for adult blind.

INDUSTRIES AND SALES DIVISION. Homebound and aged blind residents of the state are provided a variety of rehabilitation services by the Board's Industries and Sales Division. Working closely with the home teaching staff, clients are trained in a number of skills, which may later be put to profitable use. Materials are prepared at the central office storeroom and delivered to clients by mail and by a field worker. More than 250 individuals participated in this program during the past fiscal year producing numerous household and gift items. More than \$20,000 in earnings was distributed to participants in the program.

Exhibit sales of merchandise produced by these blind men and women were held at 231 factories, commercial houses, resorts and town fairs. Sales were increased more than 15% over last year, for a total of \$59,074.

This Division supervises the Board's workshop activities at the New Haven Area Rehabilitation Center. The industrial sewing department, operated exclusively for blind workers, was recently moved into new and more spacious quarters. Textile items produced on high speed sewing machines were sold direct to the consumer through our Sales Division for the Blind located in Bridgeport. This sales venture began a year ago. Specially trained salesmen sold approximately \$90,000 worth of well designed merchandise of Fairfield and New Haven counties. More than half of these items were produced by Connecticut workers. The remainder was supplied from near-by agencies for the blind, who are cooperating in this venture.

SOCIAL CASE WORK. The Social Case Worker has given supportive counseling service to some 165 persons in the fiscal 1959-60, traveling over 8,600 miles and making 81 visits to new applicants for service, 148 follow-up visits and 37 collateral visits. Although falling within the general dimension of counseling, the services rendered by the caseworker have been diverse, including finding suitable boarding or convalescent homes, arranging transportation, providing financial assistance and solving medical care problems. The applicant for service has been encouraged to be self-directing and to use his own resources where possible. Only necessary aids have been granted, when independent action has been impossible. To implement this program, the caseworker has drawn upon the relief funds of the board to a total of \$22,354.52.

TALKING BOOK PROGRAM. The Board of Education of the Blind is the authorized distributor for talking book machines made available to blind persons through the Library of Congress. During the past year, 862 machines were on loan to blind clients. An additional 157 privately owned machines were approved for use in the program. Of these clients, 879 were active borrowers of recorded books from the New York Library for the Blind.

Division of Children's Services

This has been a year of growth in population of legally blind children; expansion of services and programs, particularly on the community level; and a consolidation of volunteer services geared to the needs of each child.

Prevention of blindness is considered one of the basic services of any agency for the blind. With this in mind, the division makes every effort to assist visually handicapped children with eye examinations, with the provision of eyeglasses, or with hospitalization when services are not available on the community level.

This year, 56 preschool and school-age children were served through provision of service as follows: Eye examination, optical aid devices, artificial eyes, eye surgery and hospital care.

Midway in the current fiscal year there were 193 legally blind children attending public schools and 166 enrolled at residential schools for the blind.

Consultative services were provided by Board staff for 119 children in the public school systems throughout the state. At the close of the school year there were 74 legally blind children served by local itinerant teachers in 30 towns. Braille instruction and special services to public school blind pupils were provided in 12 regional groupings of the towns being served by a special Braille teacher. It is anticipated that an additional 31 blind children will be served during the next fiscal year through itinerant teaching programs established on a regional basis or directly from the central office of the agency.

There are 32 multi-handicapped children known to this agency in need of educational facilities. Plans are being made to meet this urgent need during the next biennium.

At the present time, some of the 32 children mentioned above are making use of such facilities at the Oak Hill School for the Blind in Connecticut and other facilities outside the state.

During the past year a cooperative arrangement was initiated by the Division of Children's Services and Recording for the Blind, for the reproduction of recorded textbooks for elementary and high school students. This was the first such service to public school children in the country. This goal has been achieved and the program is progressing satisfactorily. To date, over 250 textbooks have been recorded on plastic discs.

This year the Connecticut Braille Association was formally organized and is now in the process of incorporation. Standards have been approved for transcribing of material into Braille. Due credit should be given to the Norwalk Parent's Group for their financial assistance to the Connecticut Braille Association.

In the spring, the second state-wide parents conference, sponsored by this division and Oak Hill School, was held at the residential school with group discussions on mobility and adjustment training, future plans, problems concerning the partially seeing child, and resources in recreation and physical education.

Throughout the year, the staff was particularly active in providing talks to college, parent, and volunteer groups; conference leadership; taking university courses; and as members of professional organizations.

